Reduction in ISD rates

1724. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government had earlier reduced ISD rates for some countries by 70 per cent for only one month;

(b) what was the amount of communication traffic during this period on account of reduced rates; and

(c) whether Government propose to continue the reduced rates?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) As per section 11(2) of TRAI Act, 1997, the power to fix telecom tariffs has been mandated to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) only and Government has no role in the matter. However, the TRAI *vide* 24th Amendment to the Telecommunication Tariff Order, notified on 24.01.2003, has forborne on prescription of International Long Distance (ILD) tariffs. Service Providers are free to decide their own tariff. Recently, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited have offered reduced ILD tariffs to the extent of 70% for selected countries as a promotional scheme.

(b) It is difficult to segregate the traffic on account of these reduced tariffs. However, during November, 2003, the ILD traffic of BSNL has shown as increase of about 9.58 million minutes as compared to November, 2002.

(c) The promotional ILD tariffs of BSNL and MTNL are still in operation but are permissible only for a limited period.

National Spectrum Policy, 1999

1725. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the new 'unified license' regime to which Government are migrating is in consonance with the National Spectrum Policy, 1999; and

(b) if so, the details thereof; if not, whether a revised policy should proceed the proposed migration?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) and (b) Sir, there is a New Telecom Policy-1999 (NTP-99) in existence and there is no National Spectrum Policy-1999. An addendum to NTP-99 has been issued in November, 2003, to provide for the following categories of licences for the telecommunication services:

(i) Unified Licence for Telecommunication Services permitting Licensee to provide all telecommunication/telegraph services covering various geographical areas using any technology;

(ii) Licence for Unified Access (Basic and Cellular) Services permitting Licensee to provide Basic and/or Cellular Services using any technology in a defined service area.

Therefore, the Unified Licence Regime is in consonance with NTP-99.

Import duty on mobile phones

1726. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether TRAI propose to cut import duty on mobile phones;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) to (c) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on its own has suggested that customs duty on the mobile phones may be reduced from 10% to 5% and also to abolish Special Additional Duty (SAD) of 4%. As a part of annual budget exercise, such suggestions are considered by the Government based on various factors i.e. availability of indigenous manufacturing, growth and affordability of telecom services and revenue implications, etc.